

Institute of Museum and Library Services

University of Washington Information School

The Impact of Free Access to Computers and the Internet in Public Libraries

Focus Group Guide for Public Library Users

Hello! My name is [name]. I'm working with a research project being conducted by the University of Washington's Information School and sponsored by the US government's Institute for Museum and Library Services. Please make yourselves comfortable while I tell you a little about this focus group and its purpose. We're interested in finding out how you and your family use your public library. In particular, we want to know about how you use the library's computers, website, electronic databases, Internet connections and related services, and how they may have helped you in your life. Your responses will help us evaluate and improve library computer services in libraries all over the country. Information about you is confidential except as provided by law. The focus group will take approximately 60 minutes. You can learn more about this project at <http://www.depts.washington.edu/imlspac>.

Thank you for taking the time to attend this focus group. As a small token of our appreciation, we will give you \$20 when we are finished. We very much appreciate you taking the time to help us with this important study.

Before we begin the focus group, I'd like to take a moment to discuss some procedures. First, we need to make sure that this is a safe place for each of you to share your thoughts on the topics that we will talk about today. We want to make sure that everyone's opinion is respected, but at the same time, we need you to feel comfortable offering a different point of view. We want to hear from all of you, so please respect others' people's perspectives and allow them to talk. You may have strong opinions on the topics discussed, so please share them. Yet, also know that we need to hear from the others who would like to comment on the topic, too. Finally, if you have not given your opinion on a topic, I may ask you what you think. If you don't want to speak, please feel comfortable telling me that your opinion has already been covered by others in the group. Any questions?

Now, I'd like to take just a moment to learn a little about one another. Please pick an alias and introduce yourself with it. I am also providing each of you with a sheet of paper with a few questions specific to you. Please write down your alias and fill in the information asked for. Remember, if you are not comfortable giving this information, you do not have to. Thank you.

User Aliases:

Date:

Length of Interview:

Time:

Day:

Library Code:

Place of Interview:

Interviewer Name:

Notes:

Questions:

1. How did you learn about the library's computers, websites and training? I'm going to refer to this broadly free access to computers and the Internet for the rest of our interview if that's okay.
2. What do you use the computers and the Internet for? Why? When did you start using? How often? How does it fit with your routine? (itemize each form of use) [Domain areas: civic engagement, education, eGovernment, eCommerce, employment, health, social inclusion]
3. Do you have access to a computer or the Internet anywhere else besides the library? Where?
4. If, yes, why do you still come to the library?
5. Which computer and Internet activities/courses have you taken or tried at the public library?
6. What else do you do when you come here to use computers and the Internet? (e.g., meet up with others, check out materials, story time, etc)
7. What did you learn/gain because of the free computer and Internet services? (ask for each activity s/he participated in; want a specific story or incident) [Domain area: civic engagement, education, eGovernment, eCommerce, employment, health, social inclusion]
8. Are there any things you can do now or have accomplished that you could not have done before using the library computers?
9. Is free computer and Internet access an important resource for you? How so/how not?
10. Have you used the Library's computers and the Internet to look up information on behalf of others? Why? (Lay information mediary behavior—LIMB)
11. Have other people used the Library's computers and the Internet to look up information for you? Why? (LIMB—lay information mediary behavior)
12. How has your family benefited, if at all, because of free access to computers and the Internet? [Domain area: civic engagement, education, eGovernment, eCommerce, employment, health, social inclusion]
13. How has your community benefitted, if at all, because of free access to computers and the Internet? [Domain area: civic engagement, education, eGovernment, eCommerce, employment, health, social inclusion]
14. Does anything make it difficult or prevent you from using the free computers and the Internet? (e.g MySpace, YouTube, time limits, number of Internet computers, library policies, etc.)

15. Is there anything you wanted to do via computers and the Internet that you couldn't do? Find information, learn a skill, etc.?
16. What role have library staff played in how you use/benefit from free access to computers and the Internet?
17. Does the physical setting/the library itself make a difference to how you experience or use the computers and the Internet?
18. Are the other the people you meet at the library computers helpful for you? [Good Samaritans]
19. How could the library's free computers and the Internet services be made better?
20. For how much longer will you use the free computers and the Internet? Why?
21. Have you recommended the free computers and the Internet to other people? If so, to whom (not asking for personal names here, just relationship types, e.g., friends, family)
22. Have you used the computers and the Internet on behalf of other people without necessarily being asked first?—LIMB (lay mediary information behavior) If so, for whom (not asking for personal names here, just relationship types, e.g., friends, family). What kinds of information?
23. Has anyone used the free computers and the Internet for you on your behalf without necessarily being asked first?—LIMB (lay mediary information behavior) If so, by whom (not asking for personal names here, just relationship types, e.g., friends, family) What kinds of information?
24. If free access to computers and the Internet were not available at your library, how would it affect you?
25. Is there any other way you might use the free computers and the Internet or the library website that we have not asked about?
26. Does today's visit differ from your typical visits to the library?